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ABSTRACT

Trying to reconstruct his role in the evaluation of interdisciplinary, problem-oriented courses at Cornell University's Center for International Studies (CIS), one educationist/administrator focused on the evaluation of questions. Primary staff goals included the demonstration that CIS interdisciplinary courses would better serve students as an introduction to represented disciplines than standard courses and CIS would show students how knowledge is organized into disciplines whose interactions can help illuminate international problems. Problems related to the collaborative nature of the evaluation of CIS courses were examined in detail. (Author/BJG)

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IMPACTS ON AN EDUCATIONIST/ADMINISTRATOR

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Each of us who participated in the study of the Center for International Studies interdisciplinary, problem-oriented courses sets out, here, to reconstruct a reality of earliest expectations, motives and orientations. We do this in order to select and present events and the consequences of events which have most contemporary importance to us. For me, the most important effect of this evaluation study qua evaluation studies has been what I have learned of the evolution of the kinds of questions which a study first asks and seeks to answer.

Therefore, I begin by recollecting the content of meetings in the Fall of 1971 which brought me together with the Executive Director of the Center for International Studies and the Director of the CIS Undergraduate Program to plan a study for which outside funding was to be sought. After several general discussions we got down to the work of constructing a proposal to be submitted to the Institute for International Studies, U.S. Office of Education. The first task I recommended that we assigned ourselves was an analysis of the goals and objectives which had been articulated for the Undergraduate Program. In addition to specific kinds of objectives relative to student's learning about international phenomena, two goals were identified which were the most intriguing to the three of us.

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The first of these was: CIS interdisciplinary courses, designed for freshmen and sophomores, will adequately serve students as an introduction to the represented disciplines when compared with the standard introductory course in these disciplines. The second goal was: The CIS courses will show students how knowledge is organized into disciplines, and how the interaction of these disciplines can help to illuminate International problems.

I found this second goal statement particularly rich in possibilities, for this goal statement suggested a myriad of research questions growing out of the conceptual work of Schwab at Chicago and Gowin at Cornell, relative to the "structure of knowledge" in the disciplines. For me, the CIS courses presented a special environment in which to pursue the following kind of inquiry: given a specific discipline, what are the "key concepts" which permit the telling questions asked by researchers in the discipline? What are the methods of verification used in the discipline and how do these concepts, questions and methods of verification, condition the "knowledge claims" which result from research activities? I believed that in these interdisciplinary courses, with the probable confrontation of disciplines, that a clarification of the attributes of the disciplines, along the lines of structure of knowledge questions, would become evident. This belief was based in part on my observation of the CIS course which was in progress at the time of our planning for evaluation. Specifically, in the course entitled, "Domination and Subordination", an evening session was devoted to the rise of German National Socialism. The political scientist, who was the first to

offer a short lecture that evening, commented that, from the point of view of political science, Hitler's rise to power was a particularly interesting phenomenon in that it was purely political, not directly relatable to other institutional developments in economics, religion, etc. The economist, who was the second lecturer for that evening, began his remarks with a counter claim; namely, that one can find in the economic conditions direct causes of Hitler's rise to power. He then proceeded with his prepared lecture.

The apparent contradiction of these claims seemed attributable to differences between the disciplines, their key concepts, their telling questions, and their methods of analysis of different kinds of data. If this apparent contradiction had become the subject of the evenings' session rather than a passing confusion for student note-takers, a step would have been taken in meeting the program goal of "showing how knowledge is organized into disciplines, and how the interaction of disciplines can illuminate a problem".

I have given a fairly lengthy treatment of my initial infatuation with this goal for the CIS Undergraduate Program to reconstruct for you the orientation I brought to planning for an evaluation of the courses.

My planning colleagues had another reaction. As we identified the difficulty in getting evidence for the achievement of this goal, and as I suggested, off the top of my head, a strategy of inquiry into this domain, the value they placed in this "structure of knowledge" goal deminished. From their point of view this goal had been written into the literature of the program without much rigorous contemplation. While it might be interesting for Brock to pursue these questions, they wanted us to move along in our

proposal writing to the central program objectives which could be more easily assessed.

After the meetings on CIS Undergraduate Program goals I took responsibility for writing drafts of a proposal which was to be submitted to the Office of Education. The faculty and executive staff of CIS would comment, we would discuss and I would redraft. This process stretched over a number of months and for several drafts the hypothesis that these interdisciplinary courses would serve well as introduction to the disciplines was central to the evaluation plan.

This goal was eventually dropped from consideration because of the political environment in which the Center for International Studies operates. Namely, the staff of CIS was made increasingly aware by department chairmen that the Center's offering of courses was not well received by them as they were perceived to be "cutting in" on the eminence of departments as the course offering agencies of the university. Thus, to hold the CIS courses as alternatives to the introductory courses offered by departments was an impossible political position. We settled on evaluation questions which were judged to be those likely to be helpful to the CIS program decisions and relevant to a summative statement on the success of the experimental 3-year curriculum in International Studies.

Further modifications of questions to be asked of the Undergraduate Program resulted from discussions held in Washington with the Director and staff of the Institute for International Studies. The final proposal to the Institute identified the following, generally descriptive, questions:

1. What is occuring in the lecture-discussion meetings of the interdisciplinary courses, "Peasants, Power, and Productivity," and "Ethnicity, Race, and International Relations"? The various organizational patterns (lectures vs. sections, varieties of discussion sections, etc.), levels of student and faculty participation and interest will be among the phenomena to be observed and described.

2. To what extent are there shared objectives between the courses to be observed? Assuming a high degree of shared objectives despite different topics, to what extent does different course organization appear to influence the degree to which common course objectives are met?

3. Is the interdisciplinary approach seen as necessary and/or desirable to produce understanding of complex international problems? Do faculty members concieve the purposes of interdisciplinary education in international studies (a) to prepare students for subsequent disciplinary work? or (b) to utilize previously gained disciplinary perspectives? Do faculty expectations differ from student expectations concerning the interdisciplinary approach? Student and faculty members, both those associated and not associated with the Center for International Studies program, will be surveyed.

4. Do the attitudes of faculty and students towards the specific international problem area and towards international studies in general change as a result of the course experience? For example, do students elect additional courses in international studies, reformulate their educational goals, etc.?

5. What are the unanticipated outcomes of the courses? It is

assumed that values, attitudes, and information not included as stated objectives of the courses are transmitted both to faculty and students as a result of their participation.

6. What guidelines for evaluation methodology for interdisciplinary international studies curricula can be suggested for further investigation?

Generally, then, the process of selecting questions is characterizable in hindsight by accommodation to the realities of the interests of different audiences; what information would be useful to the Institute for International Studies, what information would inform decisions at the university about the continuation of the CIS undergraduate teaching program, what information would help one course's faculty learn from the experience of another? These distinctions which are made here were not part of my operating understanding of events in this planning phase as they took place and the consequence of my blurred vision will be clear as I narrate phase two: the evaluation activities.

We received notification of a favorable response to our proposal late in the Spring of 1972, at which time I, as the project director, set out to hire a principal investigator. It had been clear from the outset that we would be hiring an evaluation specialist to carry out the study under my direction, for my responsibilities as the Associate Director of the Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education would not permit my full attention to the project. Further, even if time constraints would have permitted, my professional abilities do not include a strong methodological background.

I was pleased to encounter Whiton Paine, whose experience and expertise was directly applicable to this evaluation undertaking.

Because of his previous commitments for the summer of 1972, Whiton joined the staff of our Center approximately two weeks prior to the beginning of the Fall semester. In this two week period he was responsible for the design of a questionnaire to be given to students enrolling in the CIS course on Rural Development. As early as this initial, hurried step in the evaluation process our difficulties in communication were evident. A cause of our communications difficulty was my continuing interest in shaping the evaluation around "structure of knowledge" issues with which he had no previous experience. Every time I mentioned Schwab he looked as if I were mispronouncing the name of a cleaning instrument, for given his reading of the proposal to the Institute and his contacts with the staff of CIS, the "structure of knowledge" issues had no reference to his evaluation

tasks.

As he began to gather information, my frustration increased. When he would return from a weekly meeting of the faculty associated with the Rural Development course and present me with data on such things as the number of minutes they spent discussing their grading system, I would struggle to comprehend what on earth such data were good for; I didn't recognize that my frustration was caused by my inability to shift my orientation to the study. What had been in my terms a study of interdisciplinarity was now an evaluation of teaching and courses. I offer a tentative distinction regarding our confusion: the method of investigation which would have sought social science data appropriate to the "structure of knowledge" issue may be conceived of as educational research. The task as Whiton saw it was one of program evaluation with its requisite gathering of information appropriate to a myriad of decision types.

From the point of view of my "educational research" interests, the data on grading were, on the face of it, irrelevant, but from the point of view of the evaluation, the information we have gathered across the CIS courses on grading strategies and their consequences may make a real contribution to future course decisions.

We are now in the final stages of writing the summary report on the study and to my amazement, the Phi Delta Kappa evaluation strategy (CIPP) which Whiton adapted for the study has yielded information which would inform any subsequent investigation I might pursue on the structure of the disciplines. From the study emerges a pattern of

findings relative to "integration". In one form, we find that the extent of "integration" of readings and lectures with other aspects of the course were very important to student opinion of their experience. One of the courses, which may be fairly characterized as a Smörgasbord approach to interdisciplinary teaching, with many lecturers each with a required reading list, was found unsatisfactory. A course which presented an analytic framework which "integrated" the contributions of the disciplines was judged more favorably by students. I draw from this and from other patterns that in fact the phenomena of interest to me, namely the relationships among disciplines at a level of conceptual integration, has reality in the experience of the courses. It would be toward the unpacking of the concept of "integration" as the students used the word, that I would first turn my attention in subsequent inquiry.

What about other domains of effect which the collaborative evaluation study has had on me? They are many, but a few will suffice to conclude this presentation.

The relational problems between myself, as project director, and Whiton, as principal investigator, were heightened by my inexperience in the role. I would look forward to subsequent collaborative work in either of two modes.

1) Assuming that I set out to propose an evaluation project in which someone was to be brought in as the on-line, real-time agent, I would draw its parameters in the broadest possible fashion, bringing

prospective evaluation specialists into the project in an orientation setting in which all significant others would participate. After the evaluator was selected and the project begun, my role would be to monitor the relationships to ensure that the contracts made during the orientation were maintained to the conclusion of the project.

2) The alternative approach to a clarity of role relationships, so absent in my first trial, would be at the opposite extreme. That is, if "educational research" were contemplated with the principal actor being someone other than myself, I would establish the methodology in detail, specify a flow of data gathering and analysis, and establish definite reporting points so that the roles were clearly defined and progress of the study could be monitored carefully. I am prepared to believe that subsequent reality will not present itself in terms which can be easily treated in these two modes, but as distinguishable categories they will be helpful to future planning.

Finally, I will narrate a recent experience in which reflection on the CIS evaluation process has had direct application. I have been involved recently with another interdisciplinary research and teaching program at Cornell, the Director of which has sought the collaboration of our Center in the dissemination of course materials which they have developed over the past three years. The positive reaction of faculty in the CIS courses to the formative evaluation strategy which Whiton has employed, giving the course team data on effects of course components while in progress, has led me to suggest to the new

program that they might wish us to evaluate the courses in their program prior to a dissemination effort. The director of the program accepted this suggestion as a vehicle for objective testing of the course materials to supplement the subjective assessments of the course developers.

From the CIS experience I was attuned to the quality of his acceptance of this evaluation role for our Center. The CIS evaluation had the enthusiastic endorsement and encouragement of the administrators of the program. In the face of faculty resistance to specific evaluation activities, the administrators of CIS had been instrumental in negotiating reasonable constraints in which Whiton could conduct the evaluation. My assessment of the lower level of enthusiasm with which the director of the other interdisciplinary program welcomed evaluation has led me to lay out a detailed procedure by which all faculty in his program will be asked to make specific commitments to the proposed evaluation of their courses.

In its shortest form, the collaborative CIS project has left me saddened by some lost opportunities but wiser for having engaged in the process and for having reflected seriously on it.